DNR issues Air Quality Alert for Wisconsin over the weekend

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Body

Over the weekend, the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources issued an Air Quality Alert for parts of Wisconsin.

According to reports, the air quality reached a category designated as "unhealthy" for some groups.

Nelson Institute for Environmental Studies and Department of Atmospheric and Oceanic Sciences professor Tracey Holloway said the quality of air is affected by weather patterns and emissions.

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"Day-to-day changes in air pollution are strongly linked to wind patterns, where low winds can allow pollution to build up to unhealthy conditions," Holloway said in an email to The Badger Herald.

Over the weekend, Holloway said most of the Upper Midwest was in the "yellow" moderate category, and there were smaller areas that turned "orange" in Wisconsin, which means unhealthy.

This happens when low wind levels and other factors allow pollution to build up across the region over a few days, Holloway said.

Holloway said these alerts can help people plan their activities based off any potential health risks.

"Fine particulate matter is a health risk, especially for children, the elderly and people with respiratory disease," Holloway said in an email statement. "For example, if you have asthma, you may not want to go for a run on an 'orange' air quality day."

Different pollutants also have different health impacts. Over the weekend, Holloway said fine particulate pollution triggered the alert. These kinds of pollutants can correlate with respiratory disease, heart disease and premature mortality, among other health impacts.

But, Air Quality Alerts can help agencies and organizations manage emissions.

"For example, in Arizona, there are 'no burn days' when wood burning - like fireplaces or fire pits - are banned," Holloway said in an email.

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Holloway said these extra considerations usually occur on days with low winds when pollution has the potential to build to unhealthy levels in the air.

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Though the DNR has recently issued these Air Quality Alerts more often for reasons that are not related to managing emissions, Holloway said it's not because the air is dirtier.

"In fact, air pollution in Wisconsin is going down. Our air is getting cleaner almost every year," Holloway said in an email statement. "It may be that we're hearing more about air pollution."

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